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LAND RESOURCES: DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT

Chairman's Summary and Proposal for Action

Highlights of Debate:

1. Discussion on A/CONF.151/PC/62 showed the regional and global nature of the desertification problem and the important developmental and environmental implications that need careful investigation and immediate action. Several delegates expressed the view that desertification had a significant impact on the earth's climate and resources and should be seen as an important environmental trend affecting climate change.

2. The document was welcomed for its consideration of desertification in the broader framework of land degradation, with its direct and indirect causes. Differing views were expressed on the definition and conceptualization of desertification. Some delegates argued that desertification is caused by over-use of agricultural, pastoral and sylvicultural lands and is mainly a consequence of inappropriate land-use methods. Others suggested taking an

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approach which incorporated all factors - soil, water, flora, fauna and climate - as well as the associated socio-economic dimensions in dealing with the problem of desertification. The peculiar problem of waterlogging and salinity in irrigated areas was also cited by some as a major cause in the spread of desertification.

3. The urgent need for action to combat desertification was expressed by many delegates. Various recommendations to combat desertification were also put forward. One of the recommendations states that increased resources should be provided: (a) to study the land-use practice that contributed to land degradation and the promotion of ecologically sustainable land-use practices; (b) to develop simple procedures for assessing and measuring land degradation; and (c) to develop education and extension programmes directed at land owners and users with particular reference to traditional owners and the transfer of their body of traditional knowledge and concept of stewardship. The program should involve the land owners and users in all aspects of research, monitoring, and extension work.

4. There was also a suggestion that action to combat desertification should be seen at three levels: the village level, the national level and the international level. The village level should be given first priority as we often have the tendency to forget that the real combat against desertification has to take place on the local level where human beings struggle for survival. When planning and implementing desertification control at the village level, the focus should be on promoting the participation of local people, the development of technologies that are accepted and can be managed by local people and the search for appropriate solutions to land tenure and ownership issues which are essential for good land-management practices. At the national level, the development of an integrated and multi-sectoral and cross-sectoral approach and favourable economic and social policy is needed. At the international level, priority should be given to the systematic analysis and processing of desertification control information and to better access to it for all interested groups of users.

5. The African Group represented by the Ambassador of Senegal underscored the devastating impact desertification had on people and economies of Africa where 45% of the world's deserts and arid lands are found. The African group emphasized the following points regarding the document and the programmes that needed to be developed in dealing with desertification.

6. Serious concerns were raised by the inadequate attention given to the result of the United Nations Plan of Action to Combat Desertification (UNPACD), the financial and technical support given in its implementation, the need for further international cooperation that might be required in this area as requested during PrepCom I. The request to PrepCom II to pay particular attention to the developmental aspects, social and economic dimensions and popular participation was not well reflected in the document (A/CONF.151/PC/62) and required further strengthening.

7. There was a suggestion that desertification should receive greater attention as a social and economic development problem requiring a cross-sectoral and comprehensive integrated approach in the programme activities designed to combat it. Poverty is seen as a primary contributor to

environmental degradation and the creation of environmental refugees in areas prone to desertification and drought.

8. The African group argued that the regional aspect of the desertification process and desert conditions must be given due attention in any programme that might be conceived to address the problem. They also stressed the importance of taking into account the development of institutional capacity, manpower and infrastructure and the global mobilization of resources for desertification control activities.

9. The experience from Nordic supported projects and activities provided insights to the ongoing effort to combat desertification. They acknowledged that many projects were of the "single component type". There had often been a lack of local participation in all stages of the project cycle and a lack of rational cooperation both internationally and at the national level. The Nordic experience suggests that the most important areas of research and development to combat desertification are:

(a) Understanding of the desertification concept and its implications for development;

(b) Practical monitoring of desertification;

(c) Sound productive practices;

(d) Local socio-economics and local participation;

(e) Land tenure issues;

(f) Exchange of experience and coordination.

10. There was a repeated call by many delegates for greater cooperation between UNCED and UNEP, since UNEP is given a special mandate by the General Assembly to prepare a report on desertification. In particular, the Nordic countries would like UNEP to work closely with UNCED in the preparation of its desertification report. They would also like to see the Agenda 21 parts of the UNEP report integrated in the documentation for the next session of the Preparatory Committee in March 1992.

11. In general, support was given to the objectives and programme activities outlined in options for Agenda 21. But, some expressed the view that priority should be given to the curtailment of ongoing desertification instead of the rehabilitation of severely desertified areas, which they felt was costly. Similarly, the programme activities in paragraph 90 of document A/CONF.151/PC/62 were considered to be exhaustive and establishing priorities was recommended. Several countries pointed out that in developing the elements for Agenda 21, due attention should be paid to linkages with other topics such as fragile ecosystems, an integrated approach to planning and management of land resources, and sustainable agriculture and rural development.

12. The recommendations to be included as Options for Agenda 21 are presented below and indicated in [ ].

V. OPTIONS FOR AGENDA 21

Basis for Action

81. Efforts to control desertification have been going on for many years, but they need to be improved and made more effective. At this stage it was felt that a system was needed to better focus the control efforts. For this reason this report presents a broad programmatic framework. This programmatic framework, and the options for action proposed could later be developed as part of Agenda 21, possibly within the framework for action in fragile ecosystems.

82. The programmatic framework is intended to provide a simple, logical structure and an immediate focus for desertification control. The framework also serves as a basis for preparing desertification control action recommendations and should facilitate the selection and design of effective control interventions. At the same time, it can be used for testing the validity of ongoing projects or for evaluating new proposals suggested by others. The framework also offers a systematic way to decide on the priority of specific control efforts. Such priorities will have to be set among the many possibilities for controlling desertification in the light of financial and physical constraints. In general, the framework should help to focus the discussions on desertification on the proper control efforts. It is hoped that it may be developed into a veritable blueprint, a detailed plan of operations for the control of desertification.

83. It is pointed out here that a major, new instrument for improved desertification control is currently being developed by UNEP/GRID in the form of a world Atlas of Desertification. This work, which is expected to be available in 1992, will provide world maps of soil degradation drawn to a scale of 1:10 million and separate, supporting cartographic documents of case studies in selected countries.

Main Objective of Desertification Control

84. The overall objective of desertification control is to promote use of drylands in such a manner that it ensures a sustainable livelihood for those who depend on those resources. Sustainable use of the drylands means that these lands are not used beyond their ability to support agriculture and livestock production, or non-productive uses such as recreation and military operations. The impact of desertification is felt beyond the dry regions, for example, in terms of erosion materials are deposited by air and water in neighbouring countries, or even much farther from their origins in the drylands. The importance of desertification control, therefore, exceeds the strictly regional concerns and interests of the drylands populations.

85. The immediate purpose of desertification control, as indicated by the term itself, is to control ongoing desertification by curtailing the further degradation of the soil and vegetation resources of the drylands. UNCOD (1977)

defined the immediate purpose along the same lines i.e., "to prevent and to arrest the advance of desertification and, where possible, to reclaim desertified land for productive use." In short, desertification control aims to improve the existing land conditions in some dry areas and to keep the soil and vegetation resources in as good a state as possible in other dryland areas.

86. The existence of control operations themselves does not however guarantee that the purpose of desertification control will be achieved. Factors outside the immediate technical control operations, such as socio-economic conditions and political or religious considerations, may prevent achievement of comprehensive desertification control. Such non-technical issues must be identified as conditions that must be resolved if the control operations are to succeed.

87. The suggestions offered here have one thing in common - they are all designed to offer pragmatic approaches to desertification control. They are also designed to fit into the proposals for Agenda 21 for Land Resources (A/CONF 151/PC/42/Add.2). They must also address head-on the various deficiencies identified in relation to action to combat desertification to date, and, in particular, in the implementation of the PACD, such as the lack of political will or the institutional questions. Some of these issues are already being addressed in a general manner in other papers before the Preparatory Committee, for example on institutions.

88. The specific management objectives of desertification control are best defined separately for the three categories of operations that are necessary to achieve comprehensive control:

(a) Prevention of the spread of desertification

89. This is more relevant for slightly desertified or non-desertified areas and the objective could be to maintain and continue proper land-use. Proper land-use in the peripheral non-desertified areas that are prone to desertification should be maintained through a combination of three actions: strengthening the control by village associations or nomad groups over their land resources; improving the land management techniques of local populations by modernizing and reinforcing the agricultural extension services; developing physical land-use plans or master plans to guide the actions above.

(b) Curtailment of ongoing desertification

90. This is relevant in moderately and severely desertified areas and the specific objective could be to contain and end the misuse or over-use of land resources. Two distinctly separate efforts could be undertaken to control ongoing desertification, one which focuses on misuse, and the other concentrated on over-use of the land resources.

(c) Rehabilitation of severely desertified areas

91. This is relevant in selected, very severely desertified areas and the objective could be revegetation and rejuvenation of the area. In recognition of the fact that rehabilitation of degraded areas is a costly undertaking and

will provide mostly long-term benefits, and in view of the fact that already degraded areas in many cases no longer pose immediate threats requiring immediate action, the resource recovery would be limited to selected areas.

[Promotion of socio-economic development of affected areas by desertification]

92. The priority for desertification control efforts will undoubtedly be set, at least in part, by the availability of funds. Also, desertification control is one of several environmental initiatives that will be considered by UNCED. The global priorities for control will therefore be evaluated in the context of other financial and environmental concerns. Considering this overall constraint, it seems prudent to give high priority to the prevention of desertification (category (a)) in large non-desertified areas and to the rehabilitation of certain specific severely desertified areas (control category (c)), and then to embark on a full-scale attack on ongoing desertification in moderately degraded areas (category (b)). The prevention programme could be designed to contain the spread of desertification and avoid further damage. The focus of the rehabilitation programme could be on certain severely desertified areas. The programme will only rehabilitate those degraded areas, such as certain watersheds, deflation areas, etc., that, if left untreated would continue to have a negative impact on a much wider region. Secondly, the programme would rehabilitate environmentally sensitive areas, certain wetlands, wildlands, or other areas that have particularly vital ecological functions in the world's drylands. Broad efforts to curtail ongoing desertification in other desertified areas could subsequently be undertaken in line with the priorities set by each country concerned. Countries should set their priorities in deciding between measures designed to curtail degradation on over-used and on misused lands.

93. Over-utilization of land is often detected at a later stage, almost after the fact, i.e., after the damage is obvious. Misuse or inappropriate use of land is easier to detect and therefore easier to control than over-use. The wrong use of land resources can be recognized and terminated at an early stage. Wrong land-use includes the use of sloping, unprotected lands for farming, or the use of lands unsuitable for crop production because of inherent low soil moisture. More generally, desertification control has become an integral part of development planning, particularly for the rural sector, in the relevant countries and sub- regions. It has to be integrated into programmes and policies for poverty alleviation, employment generation, agricultural production (including, in particular, animal husbandry), village forestry and small industry development and settlement planning. Control programmes that operate as "add-on" measures independently of other development programmes may well fail to meet those objectives.

[94. The following programme areas are proposed to combat desertification and drought:

Proposed Programme areas

A. Building up the knowledge base and developing an information and monitoring system of fragile ecosystems

B. Intensifying afforestation activities, combating land degradation, support of the management of biotic resources

C. Developing programmes for alternative livelihood systems on marginal lands

D. Encouraging and supporting popular participation and environmental education

E. Establishing enabling mechanisms and a Desertification Fund

F. Designing programmes to cope with environmental refugees

A. Building up the knowledge-base and developing an information and monitoring system of fragile ecosystems

1. Basis for action

Determine the potential of resources and the limits of their productive capacity and assess the current system of production utilization and exploitation. Increase the knowledge base that would allow for timely intervention. Promote a multi-sectoral and integrated approach.

2. Objective

Institute sustainable management of the resources with the view to improving the living standard of the populations in the desert and semi-arid areas. Promote data coordination between national, subregional and regional institutions. Ensure coordination of sectoral ministries and institutions.

3. Activities

(a) Strengthen research and national training capabilities.

(b) Develop inventories of the resources.

(c) Develop integrated information systems for environmental monitoring, accounting and impact assessment.

(d) Develop the knowledge-base on the production and conservation practices of the concerned population.

(e) Strengtnen capacities in conservation legislation, institutions and techniques related to fragile ecosystems.

(f) Strengthen the meteorological and hydrological networks and monitoring systems to ensure adequate communication to regional and international weather centres.

(g) Support the acquisition of relevant and necessary equipment and materials and access to data.

(h) Establish mechanisms for preventive measures and early warning systems.

(i) Strengthen national machinery to coordinate and implement the strategic framework programmes for fragile ecosystem management.

B. Intensifying afforestation activities, combating land degradation, and support of the management of biotic resources

1. Basis for action

Increase vegetative cover, promote biodiversity conservation and mitigate global warming as Shown in IPCC report - reforestation of 12 million hectares per year during the next 40 years would slow down significantly the rate of increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

2. Objective

Improve biomass production, ecological stability and soil and water conservation. Improve management of forest resources and promote alternative energy sources other than fuelwood. Reduce global warming. Promote biological diversity and the safe utilization of the genetic resources.

3. Activities

(a) Intensive afforestation and reafforestation and support measures to increase vegetative cover.

(b) Development of agro-forestry.

(c) Protection, restoration and conservation of water and soils.

(d) Increasing planting of indigenous and exotic tree species for woodlots and community forests and implementation of agro-forestry practices with due consideration to individualized incentives, including incentives for women.

(e) Promote alternative energy sources other than fuelwood (e.g. solar, wind, etc.) with particular attention paid to women.

(f) Promote collection, evaluation and conservation of gene pools.

(g) Establish mechanisms for soil and water conservation.

(h) Improve water management in irrigation system.

(i) Develop and maintain institutional and legislative capacity and capabilities required for the conservation of biological diversity.

(j) Strengthen wildlife management programmes.

C. Developing programmes for alternative livelihood systems on marginal lands

1. Basis for action

Increased population pressure on drylands generally comes from local population growth, from concentration of livestock and human population on areas where carrying capacity is outstripped. Reduce pressure on the resources of marginal lands. Poverty eradication.

2. Objective

Promote alternative economic activities to reduce population pressure on marginal lands. Improve the living standards of the people, particularly those affected by desertification to contribute to the prevention and reversal of desertification through poverty eradication. It is therefore considered of utmost importance that the world community undertake a new and singular commitment, through what can be called an Absolute Poverty Eradication Programme (APEP) for the next decade.

3. Activities

(a) Introduction of off-farm employment in rural areas and centres with particular encouragement given to smaller entrepreneurs, women, youth and the informal sector.

(b) Improve land resources and livestock management.

(c) Integrated rural development programmes.

(d) Human resource development.

(e) Improvement of terms of trade and addressing Africa's external debt issue.

(f) Promote soicial services such as rural water supply, health care delivery systems, and rural infrastructural development.

(h) Support and encourage developmental activities undertaken by women.

(j) Promote literacy programmes particularly among women, youth and elderly people.

D. Encouraging and supporting popular participation and environmental education

1. Basis for action

As the users and primary beneficiaries of natural resources, the participation of local populations in environmental conservation is important. The important role of determining the level of environmental

consciousness cannot be over-emphasized. Promotion of environmental education for all ages and sectors of society will be enhanced by a greater awareness of the causes of desertification.

2. Objective

Promote greater awareness of environmental issues among the public, support greater public participation in environmental programmes, establishment of decentralized institutional systems to allow decision-making at grass-root level.]

3. Activities

(a) Mobilization of the public to appreciate and promote desertification control measures.

(b) Undertaking of prior assessment and public reporting of the environmental impact and reporting of the environmental impact and risks of any policies, plans, projects, products or industrial facilities that may have significant effects on human health and the state of environment.

(c) Reaffirmation of the right of individuals, groups and organizations to participate in decisions regarding desertification control.

(d) Democratization of environmental action, including the enhancement of the role and the opportunities of women and NGOs.

E. Establishing mechanisms and a Desertification Fund

1. Basis for action

The increasing depletion of financial resources by the collapse of commodity trade, escalating external debt-service payment and the huge costs of current levels of control of the massive problems of desertification and drought call for massive international financial resources to combat desertification. There is a need to underscore the particular situation in Africa. Indeed, Africa has the vast Sahara desert, Kalahari and the Sahel with their enormous desertification and drought problems. This fact calls for special international consideration in the commitment of resources for environmental protection and desertification control.

2. Objective

An international programme for the promotion of efforts towards the prevention and reversal of desertification and control. Develop programmes and support the strengthening of existing ones with the view to alleviate the suffering of all the people living in the affected areas and those that are threatened through desertification.

3. Activities

(a) Identify and implement programmes which will meet daily needs for food, shelter and energy requirements.

(b) Strengthen and implement national programmes for combating desertification through the full involvement of the people, Government, women, youth, private business, trade unions and environmental groups and NGOs.

(c) Promote public awareness and environmental education.

(d) Support a more coordinated approach to desertification research, and other operational activities in the areas of desertification control being undertaken by sub-regional institutions such as (CILSS), IGADD and SADCC and other sub-regional and regional organizations.

(e) Encourage the use of existing environmentally sound sources of energy, particularly solar, wind and biogas energy.

(f) Develop and implement policy measures, programmes, and strategies that will reduce rural and urban poverty.

(g) Encourage and reactive regional and international cooperation.

F. Designing programmes to cope with environmental refugees

1. Basis for action

In many parts of the world there is an increasing number of refugees of an economic and ecological nature. These displaced populations settle in fragile ecosystems which also provide feed for their livestock and their building materials, forming the nucleus of desertification.

2. Objective

To facilitate the establishment of refugee settlement. Promote alternative income-generating activities in order to reduce pressure on the fragile ecosystem.

3. Activities

(a) International support for the establishment of environmentally sound refugee and displaced-people camps.

(b) International support for environmental education for refugees and displaced people.

(c) Environmental management programmes based on introduction of alternative income-generating activities to tap the human-resources potential of the refugees.